

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A method for treating tissue having a surface in an arthroscopic environment of a mammalian body having a body temperature with a probe having a proximal end and an electrode at a distal end, comprising the steps of providing a warmed irrigating solution having a temperature approximating the body temperature, delivering the warmed irrigating solution into the arthroscopic environment, introducing the distal extremity of the probe into the arthroscopic environment, positioning the electrode adjacent the surface of the tissue and supplying thermal energy to the electrode so as to treat the tissue whereby the warmed irrigating solution inhibits undesirable heating below the surface of the tissue.

2. The method of Claim 1 wherein the warmed irrigating solution is selected from the group consisting of normal saline, ringers lactated solution, Glycine and bacteriostatic water.

3. The method of Claim 2 wherein the warmed irrigating solution has a temperature of approximately 37°C.

4. The method of Claim 1 wherein the providing step includes the step of providing an irrigation solution warmed by a tissue bath.

5. The method of Claim 1 further comprising the step of monitoring the ambient temperature within the arthroscopic environment.

6. The method of Claim 5 wherein the monitoring step includes the step of monitoring the ambient temperature within the arthroscopic environment with a sensor carried by the distal extremity of the probe.

7. The method of Claim 5 wherein the supplying step includes the step of modulating the amount of thermal energy supplied to the electrode in response to the ambient temperature within the arthroscopic environment.

8. The method of Claim 1 wherein the supplying step includes the step of supplying radio frequency energy to the electrode.

9. The method Claim 8 wherein the supplying step includes the step of supplying radio frequency energy between the electrode and a return electrode, the electrode and the return electrode being coupled to a radio frequency generator.

10. The method of Claim 9 wherein the return electrode is carried by the distal extremity of the probe.

11. The method for Claim 1 wherein the surface is a fibrillated cartilage surface, the supplying step includes the step of supplying sufficient thermal energy to the electrode to reduce the level of fibrillation at the fibrillated cartilage surface.

12. A method for treating tissue having a surface in an arthroscopic environment of a mammalian body having a body temperature with a probe having a proximal end and a radio frequency electrode, comprising the steps of providing a warmed irrigating solution having a temperature approximating the body temperature, delivering the warmed irrigating solution into the arthroscopic environment, introducing the distal extremity of the probe into the arthroscopic environment, positioning the electrode adjacent the surface of the tissue, supplying radio frequency energy to the electrode so as to treat the surface of the tissue whereby the warmed irrigating solution inhibits undesirable heating below the surface of the tissue and monitoring the temperature of the arthroscopic environment so as to modulate the supply of radio frequency energy to the electrode in response to such monitored temperature.

15. The method of Claim 14 wherein the return electrode is carried by the distal extremity of the probe.